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ABSTRACT

Library users want access to it all--whatever they need, whenever they need it, without restrictions because of content. This library user suggests that libraries should preserve and provide the novel, old newspapers, pop culture, and films. Financing preservation programs for old newspapers is needed for tabloids as well as the Times. These are also aspects of our culture, they should be preserved and provided. The State Library should provide films for enjoyment as well as for research. There should also be a redesign of microfilm machines, an increase in filmscript holdings, and spoken language records, and a rescheduling of library hours to better conform to user needs. A response to this opinion paper indicates that libraries must understand user needs in terms of individuals. Differences in the perception of the printed word, the live event, the televised program, and the audio tape record suggest that all forms of media are essential in libraries. The library's future role will depend upon its ability to fuse new services and new clientele, via a variety of means. (Author/MBR)

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News

New York State Governor's Conference on Libraries
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GETTING IT ALL, SAVING IT ALL
SOME NOTES BY AN EXTREMIST

Position Paper on
FUNCTIONS AND SERVICES

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"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Esther M. Swanker

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC) AND USERS OF THE ERIC SYSTEM."

March 1978

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Thomas Wolfe left us the definitive image of the library user as extremist when he wrote of his fictional self, Eugene Gant, confronting private madness in Harvard's Widener Library.

> "Now he would prowl the stacks of the library at night, pulling books out of a thousand shelves and reading in them like a madman," Wolfe wrote. "The thought of these vast stacks of books would drive him mad: the more he read, the greater the immense uncountable number of those which he could never read would seem to be. Within a period of ten years he read at least 20,000 volumes -- deliberately the number is set low -- and opened the pages and looked through many times that number. This may seem unbelievable, but it happened. Dryden said this about Ben Johnson: 'Other men read books but he read libraries' -- and so now was it with this boy. Yet this terrific orgy of the books brought him no comfort, peace, or wisdom of the mind and heart. Instead, his fury and despair increased from what they fed upon, his hunger mounted with the food it ate."

This was Wolfe's condition in "Of Time and the River," and we know how it all came out. He never read all those books. He tried to disgorge his synthesis of what he <u>had</u> read, and he left us a set of novels as dense with undigested life as the Widener was with its undigestable expanse of volumes.

Wolfe gives many people literary indigestion these days because of his excesses, but whatever his faults in executing his strategy, that strategy was sublimely heroic in its motive: he wanted it all. Most of us are less heroic, more selective than Wolfe; but what we do want may seem as irrational as Wolfe's strategy. What we want is <u>access</u> to it all -- whatever we need, whenever we need it.

I speak as an early have-not who slowly discovered the world of possibility, and am now most unwilling to let anyone put limitations on it. I was raised in a family in which only one uncle read books, of a kind not quite suitable for a child, though I read them anyway. My grammar school had no library, and my high school's was one of, shall we say, moderate resources. Every student's crutch in my neighborhood was the Albany Public Library system, and so it was that the John Van Schaick Lansing Pruyn branch on North Pearl Street became my personal point of entry into the beauty and magic of books. Good books. The trashy ones I collected on my own, stored them in the attic and entered their magic with the firm intuition from my uncle that trash is also good for the soul.

I joined the Pruyn (rhymes with mine) as soon as I was old enough to take books out by myself. Was I ten? It stood on the southeast corner of North Pearl and Clinton Avenue, one of Albany's busiest intersections in the booming, bustling Downtown Age, when the crowds were six abreast on the sidewalks at high noon and all day Saturday, when all the trolley cars were crowded, and you had to stand in line to buy two pounds of ambrosia, which in those days came packaged as Martha Washington's dark chocolate butter creams.

The library, built as a free library by the family of an aristocratic 19th century Albany Dutchman on the site of his birthplace, was a small architectural gem. I remember it as a brownstone with elaborate stained glass windows, a huge revolving door, iron grillwork railings around a narrow, precarious interior balcony, and fetching step gables in the old Dutch style. Inside it was silent, solemn and vast,

as much a cathedral to my ten-year-old self as was Chartres in a later moment of awesome reverence for interior space.

The white-haired librarian with the pince-nez, the loose-fitting silk blouses, and the orthopedic shoes, was the most soft-spoken, gentle woman I had ever met, including my revered great aunts, who though like her in a way, were very unlike her in communicating the nature of softness as a way of life. Her generosity was as impressive as the far reaches of the library's cathedral ceiling. She would give me any book I wanted, give it with a grace and a supreme courtesy I thought unique, but which I have since found to be an archetypal element in certain women who continue to give their lives over to the care and handling of books and book borrowers.

I like to think her name was Anna.

There was another librarian on duty in Miss Anna's (she was definitely a Miss) absence, and I think of her with an upturned nose, steel-gray hair pulled tight, wire-rimmed spectacles riding ominously low, brusque, imperious, and proprietorial about books, and forever shushing people who turned pages with too much flourish, or had the temerity to clear their throats with vile-bodied impetuosity. I think of her as Miss Hetty (a Miss for reasons quite different from those which kept Miss Anna from connubiality.) She too is perpetuated in the oversoul of librarianism.

And so there in the Pruyn Library, softly and without flourish, I made the acquaintance of Tom Swift, O. Henry, Rafael, Sabatini, Nordoff and Hall, Sherlock Holmes, Jack London, Charles Dickens, and that most loathsome purveyor of scandalous language, John Steinbeck. I checked out "Of Mice and Men," a slim volume suited to my attention span in that

day, and had not read more than six pages before I came across a g_d d__n, and even more blasphemous utterances, right there on the printed page.

Oh hallowed trauma!

What was a conscience-heavy child to do in the presence of the occasion of sin? I swiftly took the book back, vowing never again to permit Steinbeck or his filthy ilk to corrupt my days.

But I kept confronting the rancid volume on subsequent trips past the shelf where it lurked, and before long, oh puling weakling that I was, I checked it out once again, this time to finish it, to find myself weeping for Lenny, weeping even more vigorously for George, and full certain I would be a Steinbeck freak for years to come, and indeed was. And from then into the age of Joyce and Lawrence, Miller and Mailer, Penthouse and Screw, I came to adhere most wickedly to a new vow: that no man, no institution, and no abstraction, even one of my own making, should ever again hold censoring power over what I chose to read.

I have a woman friend who wrote a novel that her two local libraries will not circulate. She says the librarians apparently view it as an unseemly book. And it certainly is an unseemly book. It is full of scatological stuff that would curl an astronaut's toenails. It is also uproariously funny. By what right do librarians set themselves up as guardians of toenail curling? This is as outrageous as was their destruction of the work of radical American writers during the age of McCarthy. Albert Maltz, for one, was a novelist with a very leftish vision of how the world should be run. He saw his books taken off their shelves and thrown away. McCarthy faded and the same shelves are now full of the writings of Ho Chi Minh, Mao Tse Tung and other leftish fellows, but the works of Albert Maltz are gone.

* * * *

In those hazy days fifteen years before anybody ever heard of McCarthy, the Pruyn Library was a haven of warmth, a clean well-lighted place that attracted winos and vagrants, crazies and shopping bag ladies, and ordinary knights of the road of the depression years. all lonely old people who would sit for hours looking at an open page of an atlas, or the classified ads in the morning paper.

But if they nodded off to sleep, Miss Hetty would come running and usher them streetward, for libraries are for reading, not for sleeping. And the old folks coming off the nod would loudly protest: "I'm reading! I'm reading!" Of course when Miss Anna intervened in such cases, she would nudge the old folks into waking and let them go back to their atlases.

And why not?

The library in an open society is an agency dedicated to the freedom of the mind as a creature comfort, the enemy of all tyranny, and why shouldn't that include the tyranny of isolation? If I ran a library I would recruit aged vagrants and shopping bag ladies to come and use my facilities, and hobnob sedately with the scholars in the far corner. It would give the place tone. It would keep me reminded of the need to preserve what I can of the receding past, and of my function as a keeper of universal and not merely elitist verities.

Somewhere in the 1960's, the wrecker's ball did in the Pruyn Library. Downtown had decayed into a disaster area, people stopped using the place, and also it interfered with the state's tidy plans for an access road to an arterial highway. Away went the lovely old Pruyn, despite protests from the usual band of bleeding hearts who never seem to understand the superiority of pavement to elegant buildings.

What I am feeling now when I think of this is the irreparable loss of sacred things, of things I loved but could not own or save, of things I never knew existed, and would not know of for years to come. Libraries certainly can't preserve everything. Sometimes they can't even preserve themselves. But I do believe it is the essence of The Good Librarian (a rose for you, Miss Anna) to disbelieve such nasty, negative facts, and to insist in our own Wolfean way that we must get it all, save it all, and see to it that nobody is deprived.

But deprived of what?

My idiosyncratic laundry list, obviously only a symptom of a much broader capacity for public disgruntlement and anxiety, would touch on these areas: the novel, old newspapers, pop culture, and films.

Writing novels is what I do and I do it in an age when public interest in such work has waned. I have no fear for the survival of what Henry James called "The Great Form," any more than I fear for the survival of song or dance. But many of the major publishing houses have reduced their new fiction, I was told recently by a critic who keeps track of such statistics, to about ten per cent of their lists in any given season. This does not make new novels any better or worse, but it makes them rarer. I would assume the existence of a concomitant slacking of interest in fiction by buyers for libraries, a diminishment of shelf space for fiction, and other signs of decline.

I recently heard a complaint from an Albany library scientist about the fiction collection being weak at State University at Albany -- much good modern fiction not in the card catalogue; insufficient copies of Nabokov's novels, etc. At the Harmanus Bleecker Library in Albany,

which in all respects I find to be a superior library for its size, I recently tried to lay hands on Ford Maddox Ford's "The Good Soldier," one of the best novels of the century, and found the library did not have it. It took about a month of hunting in the inter-library loan network to find me a copy.

I could cite other instances and no doubt any librarian would shrug and say "Normal." But I have, nevertheless, a growing anxiety that the anti-fiction propaganda is taking root with abstract insidiousness. I am too often frustrated in looking for books, new and old. Forty thousand books are published each year in this country, and the figure is rising. Yet the quality novel becomes, increasingly, an estranged cousin in this robust family.

To be sure, extraordinary men are still writing novels: Graham Greene, John Cheever, Gabriel Garcia Marquez, Gunter Grass, Saul Bellow, among others, and there is hardly cause for despair over the loss of the great form, which since its inception has been the repository of the imagination in its most personalized condition. Bellow, in an article some years ago called, "Machines and Storybooks," noted his own personal response (while reading "Ulysses") to the battle between modern society, imposing itself on a man (Leopold Bloom) and the man's insistence that he is at the center of that society.

> "The all-important story appears to belong to society itself. Real interest is monopolized by collective achievements and public events, by the fate of mankind, by a kind of 'politics.' The voluminous Sunday Times is put into our hands together with Time and Newsweek, while images from television flash behind us. This is the week's record of everything of substance relating to the

human species. It is about us, our hope for survival, our common destiny. Is it, now? Does this really speak to my condition? Is this mankind, is it me, heart, soul and destiny? No, the nominally central individual studying the record does not feel central. On the contrary, he feels peculiarly contentless in his public aspect, lacking in substance and without a proper story. A proper story that would express his intuition that his own existence is peculiarly significant. The sense that his existence is significant haunts him. But he can prove nothing. And the business of art is with this sense, precisely."

For "art," we must read here "the novel," which is the proper story of all of us. And that proper story needs proper attention, protection and preservation in perilous times.

* * * *

If the times seem dangerous to the health of the novel, consider the fate of the newspapers of the 19th century, some of which have lain in the desiccated air of the most elaborate of their many mausoleums -- the stacks of the old State Library in Albany -- for three-quarters of a century. The occasional scholar, journalist, or writer who was fortunate enough to gain entrance to the stacks, which existed on eleven levels below the main reading room, entered a silent and solemn city of the past.

I was so taken with this subterranean world that I wrote of it in my first novel, both as it was and as it transformed itself into a land of the living dead in my imagination. My hero was a man named Bailey, who in a time of trouble took a job shelving books, and in the stacks discovered the old newspapers.

"These, more than anything else, aroused his curiosity. He...noted down stories that beguiled him from the old papers: Costigan's brass tools stolen from his shop; Alderman Wingate gives two-hour declamation on the anniversary of our independence; Miss Lavinia McQuade found at old Ale House with more young men acting as gallants than befits a young lady of prudent conduct; Lanahan rolls off roof and is believed to have sunstroke but is only drunk; squads of stragglers return from war after hiding in mountains for one year after Appomattox."

What caught Bailey's imagination was the small detail of a bygone time, and the archaic language. But with every turn of every page, a bit of the old paper crumbled. Worlds and history disappeared with a touch. Dried flakes of time fluttered out of Bailey's hands.

The flaking was painful to me as well as Bailey. But I did not feel the sharpness of the pain until several years later in the periodical branch of the New York Public Library when I was pursuing history of a more recent vintage -- 1930 and 1931 -- and found that the record of what I sought, in The New York News, had disappeared entirely. Some pages had clearly been ripped away by thieves, but the pulp paper was also as fragile to the touch as that of newspapers printed a century earlier. More to the point, this bound volume was the only record of these particular weeks the library owned. It had microfilm holdings for almost all years of the News, but through either oversight or neglect, this period did not exist on microfilm. And so what I wanted to read was simply gone.

Much microfilming of these old newspapers, particularly those printed on pulp -- the ones on rag paper survive longer -- has already

been done. One state library spokesman told me that if all the volumes microfilmed so far were stacked one on the other, they would reach the height of a thirty-story building. Wonderful. But uncountable other thirty-story stacks still wait to be saved from the inevitable dust bin.

Two formal programs are afoot to save them, I'm told. New York State will pay one-third the cost of microfilming bound copies of any local newspaper whose local library or historical society can come up with the other two-thirds of the cost. And the other program is called the U.S. Newspaper Project, which is an effort to stimulate state-by-state microfilming programs, through grants from the National Endowment of the Humanities.

But little financing has come forth for preservation programs so far. And Miss Lavinia McQuade, Alderman Wingate, and their companions in the history of every city in the nation, wait on the shelves of their mausoleums for the next deadly touch that will crumble forever the only record we have of their existence.

* * * *

It was in that New York Public Library branch where I found myself at a dead end of crumbled pages that I turned to other periodicals of the day, The Daily Mirror for one, and struck gold. The subject was the underworld of the 1920's and very early 1930's and I had already exhausted all that The New York Times and New York Herald Tribune and assorted magazines of significance had to say on the pressing aspects of my subject. I had done the bulk of my research in the State Library at Albany and went to New York because the News and Mirror were not on file in Albany, either in microfilm or bound volumes. These newpapers were

tabloids, flashy, raunchy sheets lacking in respectability. In the New York Public I also looked for The New York Graphic, the sleazy rag of the mid-1920's where Walter Winchell, for one, peeped his first keyhole, hoping to track my subject into its slimiest depths. But the Graphic, also, was not on file even in New York. At least that is what I was told at that time.

Even by literate underworld figures who survive into the present day, it was said more than once to me that of all the press coverage of the nefarious doings in those bad old days, The New York Times was usually the most accurate. The tabloids were fast and loose with words, faster and looser with the facts.

And yet the tabloid coverage of criminal events, their biographies of criminal life, were in their own way as valuable as the vaunted authenticity of the Times coverage. For the tabs entered regions where the Times never trod. The tabs courted the gunmen, the bootleggers, the dizzy dolls and chorines, bought their memoirs, picked their alleged brains, pumped them dry. And what they left us that the Times and Tribune did not is a report on our society at dreg level, an awareness of slime and how it oozes, a tough-talker's odyssey of life among the dead-shrewd moral cretins who helped shape the underside of our contemporary civilization.

The Times and the Trib would not, could not stoop to such coverage. It would have violated too many proprieties and precepts by which the elitist press lived and lives. But because the press lives that way is not sufficient reason for libraries to live that way.

Consider the case of The Village Voice. Here was one of the earliest of the underground newspapers, a midwife for early versions of

the modern journalism that flowered in the 1960's. Here we heard the early voices of Allen Ginsberg, Norman Mailer, Jack Kerouac, Lorraine Hansberry, John Cage. The paper opened up the four-letter vulgate to newspaper readers. It was reporting on what is now called Off Broadway when the Times was not going below 41st Street to review a play. It was analyzing the drug culture and rock music when the elitist press was still trying to decide whether it liked Elvis Presley.

I think the Times is the best newspaper in the world, but it is hardly the outer limits of journalistic expression. It would be instructive to check with say eight hundred libraries and find out how many have microfilm of the Times, and how many have microfilm or even bound copies of the Voice from the 1950's and 1960's. I would guess, conservatively, 799 to 1.

By extension of this Wolfean drive to have it all, should not our libraries also stock Penthouse and Screw as pioneer artifacts of our sexually candid age, even if they had to be in special collections, read only under armed guard? Shouldn't we have access to the movement newspapers of the 1960's, The San Francisco Oracle, Boston's Avatar, and others, as a partial weekly record of something that changed the world for about fifteen minutes and also helped end a war?

To be sure, some universities do collect such things, and minds are changing in many libraries now that pulp, porn, sleaze, and pop are viewed as artifacts of the new consciousness. But the world is busting out all over with kingly cabbages that we find in very few of our libraries. And the proper question in this improper age is: Why not?

* * * *

I remember reading in the early pages of James Agee's lovely novel, "A Death in the Family," a two-page passage where the boy Rufus goes to the movie with his father to see William S. Hart and also a Chaplin short. Agee recapped the whole plot of the Chaplin film, all the fine points of Charlie's outrageous behavior -- hiking up a girl's skirt with his cane, sitting on a bag of eggs, and I was excessively jealous. Why should Agee have intimate access to Chaplin and I be restricted to still photos of him in books? Why should I not have access to revivals of "The Gold Rush" and "The Kid," or whatever other silent classic I wanted to see? Why did the society I lived in conspire to keep me ignorant of movies -- which I loved almost as much as I loved books?

I became a film critic at one point in my life to counteract this deficiency. A newpaper paid me to go to movies and I went to hundreds. I even co-sponsored a film society for three years to bring old and new quality films to people in Albany who could not otherwise see them. It was fine, it was satisfying, but it was wrong. It wasn't my lifelong responsibility to bring the great movies of history to deprived Albany. It had been proven time and again that it was commercially unfeasible to regularly book foreign films, or off-beat films of esoteric quality, into local theaters. And so the duty obviously belonged to the libraries and museums who are the presumed guardians of our non-commercial, cultural treasure troves. The example in film had been set by such institutions as Henri Langlois' Cinematheque in Paris, and the Museum of Modern Art (MOMA) in Manhattan.

The problem, as usual, was money, or so it was said. No small library could initiate such a film collection as I envisioned. But the state could, could it not? Well it could, but it wouldn't. Ten or twelve years ago I talked to a library executive about the role of film in the new state library then being planned and was told it was minimal. The situation is the same today. The thinking is that there is no point in duplicating the MOMA collection, for instance, any more than there is a need to duplicate the extensive sound recording collection at Syracuse University, or in the New York Performing Arts Library at Lincoln Center.

Also, the state sees the State Library as having mainly a research function, a backup resource (in films) for other libraries. The state's 3,000 documentary and instructional films have been winnowed to 800, the rest distributed to the public library system. But even these 800 are not shown, even on an irregular basis, at the library.

And yet this library and cultural center, built at a cost of (the last time I looked) about $100 million, was hardly conceived as a backup resource for anything. If ever a structure was central to the broadest possible cultural statement, this enormous marble trapezoid is it. It has been the site of huge exhibitions of the Hudson River School, and the New York School, of paintings. Band concerts are held on its steps, figure skating competitions on its reflecting pool. Pop entertainers like Danny Thomas have performed, along with the Broken String Band, and the Spongy Delights. Merce Cunningham's dance troupe has performed in the theater next door, and the Acting Company has done "King Lear" and "Mother Courage."

But no films.

Film collecting is expensive and complex, fraught with copyright pitfalls, duplication problems, and more. Is it cheaper to rent films or copy them from a central collection? Are movies really too frivolous to be wrapped in marble? Are the Spongy Delights too frivolous? Is film too afield of the purpose of the Museum -- after all it is New York oriented. Is "King Lear" New York oriented? The problem is depressing. And surely such parochial thinking, if persisted in, would be little more than Babbity boosterism.

A state executive admitted to me that the basic problem is that there has been almost no thinking done on the subject. So the thinkers should, perhaps, be reminded when they are talking about not duplicating MOMA's work that they are not thinking about people outside Manhattan. Getting to MOMA for upstaters can be extraordinarily difficult; and once there, getting a ticket to a film showing is often impossible because of limited seating. I do believe this thinking is really not much different from saying that the New York Public Library has guardianship of the state's only copy of "Hamlet," and if you want to read it, well you know where to go.

Is there no way for the state to borrow films regularly from the MOMA collection for showing at the Cultural Center, which was designed as, and has become, a tourist mecca for New Yorkers and hordes of out of state travelers? Can't the state tie in somehow to the American Film Institute's remarkable collection, or the equally wonderful Kodak collection in Rochester? Can't it spend a few dollars to begin a collection of its own to be kept in Albany -- at least as a backup resource?

The world is full of remarkable filmmakers whose work will rarely be seen, even by those most eager to see it, unless access to film becomes as simple and as regularized as access to books. I speak of the work of such masters as Satyajit Ray, Jean Renoir, Akira Kurosawa, Luis Bunuel; of such brilliant moderns as Carlos Saura, Werner Herzog and Rainer Werner Fassbinder; and of such an original poet of cinema as Jean Luc Godard, who is so remote from the mainstream that his later work does not even gain commercial release in cinema-mad Manhattan any more.

Some local library systems have taken it upon themselves to collect films, and upstate now, three of them -- the Upper Hudson, The Southern Adirondack and the Mohawk Valley Library Systems -- interlock to offer a small but stunning collection of 16 millimeter prints to the public. In this respect Albany is a center of enlightenment. My son, who is seven, has seen "The Gold Rush" and "The Kid" twice each, and his second favorite film after "Star Wars" is "Metropolis," Fritz Lang's 1926 silent classic, which he has seen four times. He clearly has more access than his father ever did, but unless a broader system of public access to <u>all</u> the great films of the world is established, he -- a child of the century of cinema -- will be as frustrated in the years ahead of him as I was, and still am.

* * * *

Since it is getting on to closing time, let me condense a few odd-lot suggestions for change and move along. I would urge a redesigning of all microfilm machines by someone who may someday use one of them. All the machines I have used to date have either had no work space, or were poorly illuminated, or didn't print clearly, or were designed so that the user must stare upward at the screen in the same

manner that one watches an eclipse of the moon. The consequence of this position after about twenty minutes of reading is that one's neck is wracked by painful kinks, one's eyes water, and one's brain sputters, fumes, and leaves the library.

I would suggest also that librarians stack the most frequently used periodicals in the widest aisles of the library instead of the narrowest. I would suggest an increase in the collection of film scripts, which seem to be proliferating these days, and which are a very underrated and most readable art form.

I would suggest an increase, too, in the collection of spoken language records, particularly of writers reading their own work, so that the voice we confront on the printed page may gain yet another dimension; and more particularly, that the Harmanus Bleecker Library in Albany get a new copy of Joyce reading, for the old one has been stolen.

On the subject of theft I would suggest to the judiciary, mandatory and heinous punishment for anyone who steals microfilm, with no plea bargaining permitted for those who clip out the frames of Playboy centerfolds.

I would also suggest that libraries stay open all day Saturday and Sunday so that taxpayers who work all week can get a shot at borrowing the books and films their taxes buy for the people who can hang around the library on weekdays.

I would suggest, finally, that we offer continual prayers of thanks to all the benevolent deities, politicians, schools of library science, publishers, moviemakers, photographers, and writers who make libraries the most civilized buildings in the history of the world, even when they are enormous marble trapezoids that won't show movies.

William Kennedy has been a journalist, book and film critic, and editor. He teaches a writing course at State University of New York at Albany and is the author of three novels, "The Ink Truck" (1969), "Legs" (1975) and "Billy Phelan's Greatest Game" (1978).

RESPONSE

William Kennedy is a man who obviously knows and loves libraries. His "[some] notes by an extremist" ... Getting It All, Saving It All is a moving, highly personal testimonial to the public library institution, which he first encountered as a small boy -- curious and impressionable. Just as Thomas Wolfe's Eugene Gant, young Kennedy devoured with an insatiable appetite the ambrosia of the library's fiction collection -- tasting it all, reading and storing the best, learning from it and being shaped by it, until one day he, too, was to write novels -- in his own words, "the repository of the imagination in its most personalized condition ... the proper story of all of us." Young Kennedy's romance with the library encompassed more than what he found between the covers of a book, for he became quickly aware of and appreciative of the talents of the Miss Anna's of the library world who would inspire and titillate a small boy with their supremely generous manner extended to all who would come into the library -- from the very poor, the old, and the lonely to the scholars engrossed in the corner.

William Kennedy cares about the library's books and about the library's book borrowers. It is difficult to find fault with what he has written, so it becomes my intent to reenforce some of the concerns he has expressed, and by extension to express some of my own ideas about the functions and services of libraries.

Mr. Kennedy's concerns cover such topics as access to "whatever we need, whenever we need it"; and from a broader and more general perspective of having cause to feel anxious, he singles out his concerns for the novel, old newspapers, pop culture, and films.

Although Mr. Kennedy titles his paper, Getting It All, Saving It All, it takes but a few careful readings to discover that Mr. Kennedy is more realistic than he at first appears, for he states that "libraries certainly can't preserve everything." Yet, I don't believe there is one among us who has not experienced the frustration of not finding that particular book or periodical or film when we wanted it --and perhaps, even though we were somewhat mollified by having it come to us later through some inter-library loan network, felt it was not the same or soon enough. We empathize with Mr. Kennedy. Instant gratification is perhaps something we have all come to expect, perhaps again as a consequence of our mass mediated culture. I was struck, however, by a statement which Mr. Kennedy made concerning his difficulty in locating Maddox Ford's novel, The Good Soldier, which was not in The Harmanus Bleecker Library in Albany. Mr. Kennedy stated, "It took about a month of hunting in the inter-library loan network to find me a copy." Venturing into risky territory here -- because this statement can be subject to a number of interpretations -- I decided, however, because I was curious, to try our interlibrary loan librarian at SUNY/Buffalo's Lockwood/Abbott Library, to see what kind of response she would give me with regard to locating this title in the NYSILL network. We agreed at the outset that the inter-library loan librarian would give this request no extraordinary attention -- that she would treat it as a regular request. Her search took her precisely thirty seconds: a check of the National Union Catalog Pre-1956 Imprints showed it to be in "many places, including Cornell," she said. (But she also advised me that unless a patron advises that a work of fiction is wanted for "research purposes," fiction is considered a sub species in The New York State inter-library loan network.)

But the search for this particularly elusive novel is not the point, according to Mr. Kennedy -- but rather the alarming trend, that has existed for some years now in our country, in the de-emphasizing of fiction. In the early 1900's the ratio of literary books (fiction, poetry, drama, essays, etc.) to non-literary books (science, agriculture, business, law, etc.) was 2:1. In the 1930's and 1940's, however, this ratio began to change, and by 1960, it was 1:1. At the present time, we have come full circle with two non-literary books published for every one literary work. Clearly, in the early history of books, fiction dominated; today less than 9% of all new books published are fiction. Moreover, considering the fact that our literacy rate is the highest of any nation in the world; that the mass paperback has penetrated virtually every type of food, drug, department store, and transportation outlet in this country, in addition to the more conventional types of book distribution points; that libraries have increased; and that the numbers of students of all ages are high and presumably they are reading books, the fact remains that we are <u>not</u> a nation of book readers and that our country ranks behind England, Canada, Australia, Norway and Sweden in per capita reading! And when compared with our other media consumption habits -- we have reached a near saturation of television homes (98%); 2/3 of the adult population reads magazines regularly or occasionally; and nearly 85% of our adults read newspapers -- it is disquietening to say the least that only 25% of our adult population reads books -- regularly or occasionally. Mr. Kennedy has just cause for expressing concern -- not only for what is happening to fiction but to the reading of books in general.

Mr. Kennedy's concern for the preservation of our newspapers as a unique record of contemporary civilization (past, present, and future) is well founded. No doubt many of our newspapers have already crumbled away never again to be read or scanned, but Mr. Kennedy has accurately noted that there are various newspaper microfilming projects on both the state and federal levels for the microfilming and preservation of the newspaper record. His concern that libraries may not be including in their collections the more representative "pioneer artifacts of our sexually candid age" -- i.e., Penthouse, Screw, and the like perhaps can be assuaged by the fact that New Serial Titles does list Screw, Penthouse, and the more respectable Playboy (which is also listed in the New York State Union List of Serials). However, such chronicales as The Hustler and Blue Boy -- the latter being the porno-record for gays, have not yet made the serials titles listings. I cannot agree more that libraries should collect the record of the human commedy in all of its dimensions and descriptors.

Mr. Kennedy's information on the State Library's film collection is basically accurate -- the State Library has winnowed its collection from approximately 3600 films to its present collection of slightly under 900 titles, retained because they are consonant with the State Library's own collection and are largely non duplicative. The remainder of the active titles -- approximately 2300 -- which, after a weeding process had been evaluated as being the most appropriate for the various public library systems throughout the state --were dispersed to those libraries according to a formula that had been worked out based largely upon prior borrowing patterns. (Prior to this because of budget cuts, the State Library contracted its entire film collection to the Nassau Library System, which circulated the films as The State Library had done.) For

the State Library's film collection had basically been a circulating collection (approximately 12,000 titles a year were circulated to the public libraries): the State Library had spark-plugged the film collections of many of the public library systems, collecting in addition to the titles suitable mainly for children's story hours, films on social problems such as city redevelopment, films about New York State, Americana, training films, etc. The titles which have remained in the State Library Collection are those pertinent to New York State culture and history, Americana, some on librarianship, fire safety, and others pertaining to personnel training and administration. According to the film acquisitions librarian, the State Library's collection will continue to be augmented, but I do not believe these would be the kinds of films that Mr. Kennedy would wish to view. The State Library has apparently never intended to have a local movie theatre-type operation, although upon occasion an exceptionally good film in The State Library's collection has been shown to a wider audience. I am assured that The State Library maintains close and friendly relationships in the area of film with MOMA, Eastman Kodak, the State University System, etc. However, no formal cooperative arrangement exists between the State Library and the private film museums. Neither the Museum of Modern Art or Kodak loans out films. We are aware, of course, that MOMA has a manuscript collection of films which are shown in their auditorium, and I understand that the films in the Eastman Kodak collection are extremely rare and are accessible to scholars on the Eastman Kodak premises under a complex set of conditions. The films in the public library system, on the other hand, are available upon request through the inter-library loan network.

But, Mr. Kennedy spoke with some nostalgia and longing about not having access to the films of the classic comedians of earlier years during his own growing up period. A very quick investigation by this writer turned up some rather fascinating insights into the current world of by-gone flicks. For very nominal rates ranging from $16 to $22 for 8 mm film or $55 to $80 for the 16 mm format, the early films of such greats as Chaplin, Keaton, Laurel and Hardy, and Harold Lloyd may be purchased from Blackhawk as well as other distributors. Another heartening note is the fact that many small libraries are forming regional film cooperatives in many parts of the country, thereby successfully building and maintaining good film collections.

This, of course, is not offered as any kind of balm to Mr. Kennedy who obviously believes in the establishment of "a broader system of public access to all the great films of the world." There is not one of us here, I believe, who does not share this feeling. It's a matter of money, and priority based upon established missions and goals.

I find little to disagree with in Mr. Kennedy's modest list of desiderata as offered in his closing statement. I am as certain that at this very moment someone is dreaming up that better microfilm reader as I am certain that the power of prayer, coupled with alot of persistence, alot of arm bending, alot of money, and alot of luck can accomplish better libraries and better library services for us all.

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But it is precisely at this point that I wish to express some of my own thoughts on the subject of library services and functions.

To set the stage, I believe we must consider that in the history of all of mankind, there have been but two revolutions which have completely transformed the quality of life: the Industrial Revolution

and The Communications Revolution. The consequence of the first is seen in the mass production of commodities; and of the second, in the mass production of symbols. At the one end of The Communications Revolution continuum is the invention of the printing press which has given us the book and which marks the real birth of librarianship; at the opposite end is television, which many social scientists claim may mark the death of librarianship. For, for the first time, they point out, in television do we have so ubiquitous and pervasive a social force that its impact on our lives is to effect a massive homogenization; an establishment of a single shared national mass consciousness. We are all fed the same experiences out of the same electronic data base of messages and images. For this reason, if for none other, does the library as an institution emerge as the single most important counterbalancing force of our age as it strives to give man an identity and a soul that makes him a unique individual.

What is the function of any system of communications? It has been tersely stated to be that of watcher, forum, teacher. With but varying degrees and levels of intensity the library in fulfilling its social role may be compared to other mass media systems. These functions may be charted as follows:

FUNCTIONS OF COMMUNICATIONS SYSTEMS

FOR SOCIETY	FUNCTIONS	FOR THE INDIVIDUAL
1. Supplies a common knowledge of the environment.	1. INFORM	1. Offers enrichment.
2. Enables the members of the society to perform the socialization function for new members.	2. TEACH	2. Aids the individual in the acquisition of skills and knowledge.

3. Entertains; offers safety valve against social pressures; creates artistic form.	3. ENTERTAIN	3. Offers enjoyment, relaxation, and creative use of leisure time.
4. Helps society to reach consensus for social and political decisions in cases of social innovation and times of crises.	4. PERSUADE	4. Offers sufficient information for decision making.

To perform its functions effectively, a communications system needs to study its audience. Market researchers do it all the time; libraries do not do it as often as they should. As do other mass communication agencies, the library would find its audience to be large in number (size is relative, medium to medium); scattered; heterogeneous; and generally unknown to each other or to the source (the library). The library must recognize, however, that the mass audience for which it selects its materials and organizes its services, is made up of individuals -- individuals whose needs must be understood and satisfied, if they are to transform the storage network which is the library into a highly active, interactive, and kinetic energy force. The telling difference for the library is that it has the advantage of coming face to face with its audience in an interpersonal communication mode in a way that other agencies of mass communication cannot. It is precisely at this stage that the role of librarian as mediator and information broker becomes the most critical. The librarian needs to understand how channel noise (confusing card catalog, faulty library directionals, etc.); audience noise (selective attention, selective exposure, and selective perception); and semantic noise (asking the wrong or vague questions) can impose barriers between communicator and audience, between audience and message (content), between audience and channel

(book, newspaper, film, etc.). The librarian needs some understanding as to how the audience member encounters the media, in terms of his individual differences and predispositions. Most individuals, for example, perceive the library to be a book collection agency, and in our multi media age, libraries are inconvenient to access. There is no magic switch to be turned on or off to transport the library into our living room; at least, not as yet. We do not have the convenience of having the book delivered to our doorstep as is our newspaper. And yet the unique role of the book in our society makes any inconvenience connected with its access worth the bother. Ron Powers, television critic for the Chicago Sun Times, dramatically articulated the special role of the printed word when he reported his reactions to a William Buckley - Rev. Jesse Jackson debate which he had encountered first as a live event; then as a televised program; next as an audio-tape record; and finally as an edited transcript. The question being debated was, "Is America Hospitable to the Negro?" (See Powers, Ron, "The Medium and Three Messages: Perceptions of a Televised Debate" in Lester Asheim and Sara I. Fenwick, editors, Differentiating The Media, University of Chicago Press, 1975, 27-33). To make a long story short, Powers' perceptions of the debate differed according to the medium attended to. The live debate was witnessed as a sense of theatre or arena, with the suppressed visceral hostility of the participants ready to explode at any moment. The TV version was perceived as a highly stylized debate, with access to the substance of the dialogue as its most salient feature. The tape recorded version suggested two disinterested voices joining in a quest for truth. The transcript carried the real essence of the two men's ideologies, which became evident upon careful reading

and rereading of the text. What this suggests to me is that all forms of the media are essential in libraries for the full articulation of an event.

Some years ago, Ralph Conant in addressing The American Library Association (American Library Association. "People: Their Needs -- Our Responsibility," Audio Cassette Library for Professional Librarians, Los Angeles: Credr Corporation, 1974) stated that the library's future role in our society would depend upon its ability to fuse new services and new clientele, by drawing the new clientele into the planning stages. Any new programs and new directions would have to satisfy a number of tests: (1) meet the needs of people, (2) contribute to their aspirations, (3) be do-able, (4) appeal to the legislature, (5) give the professional a renewed sense of enthusiasm and purpose, (6) be planned carefully and concretely and (7) offer such prototypes as: (a) regional-urban observatories to meet the information needs of government units; (b) client planned reference services of a highly sophisticated type for business and industry and professionals; (c) trial packages of information services for the poor; (d) trial television programs based on library resources; and (e) systematic public relations on the local and regional levels.

It becomes obvious to me that the librarian must use every strategy that his or her versatility can muster to capture that audience, to deliver both services and content in the mode and medium desired by the audience. To make non users into users and users into loyal and active fans is the first step towards making the library the force it must become. I believe it can be done.

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